

**EXPLORING CHALLENGES OF THAI MOTHERS WORKING
FROM HOME (WFH) IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

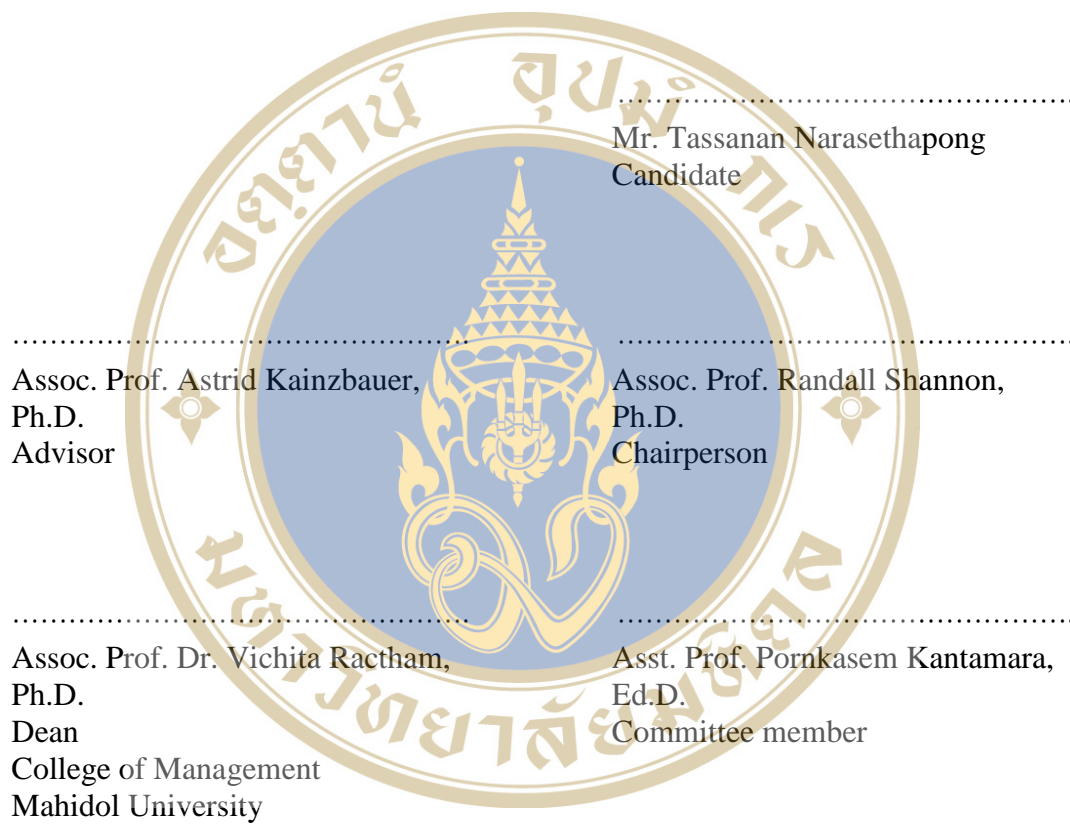


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**EXPLORING CHALLENGES OF THAI MOTHERS WORKING
FROM HOME (WFH) IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

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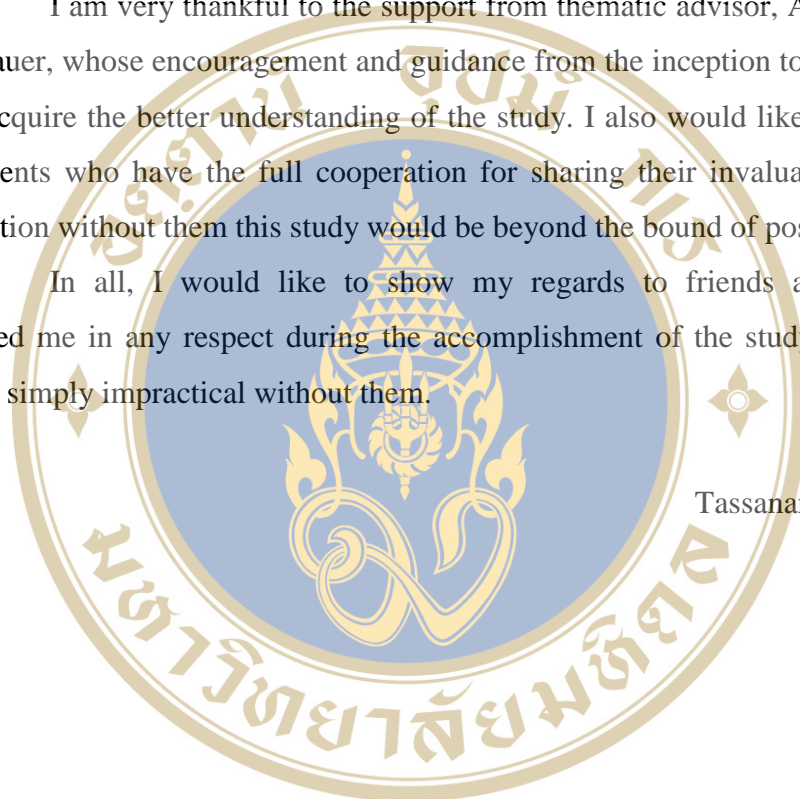
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ABSTRACT

During the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, Work From Home (WFH) became the “new normal” and solution for many organizations. This allowed companies to enact safety measures while possibly reducing operational cost. Despite the positive aspects of WFH, Leohardt (2020) claimed that 9.8 million working mothers in the U.S. are suffering from burnout stress. Therefore, this research aimed to explore working mothers in Thailand who have experiences of WFH. In this paper, psychological and physical factors were classified in order to find out which variables cause the most challenges for Thai working mothers who WFH. The results of this research can be useful in terms of recommendation on how to improve personal well-being which can lead to better overall working performances of those working mothers who WFH. A qualitative approach of interviewing was used in order to provide the insights into mothers who WFH.

KEY WORDS: Work from home/ Challenges/ Working mother/ COVID-19 Pandemic

34 pages

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and problem statement

Since 2019, many organizations allow their employees to work from home in order to mitigate the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus. However, WFH may result in negative outcomes that affect remote workers by leading to poor mental and physical well-being while also lowering productivity and performances. This can come about due to distractions at home, lack of IT equipment or knowledge, poor communication structure with the supervisor, cyberslacking and other such deficiencies. Sedentary behaviors associated with WFH can lead to greater sitting and screening time, resulting in low performance associated with current and future health and well-being (McDowell et al., 2020). However, there are still some positive aspects to WFH such as flexible working hours and autonomy of working style.

In addition, many companies believe that WFH will become common in organizations even after the pandemic has ended because the employers have already paid the fixed cost to set up a remote system for their employees. Moreover, the companies are now expecting operational costs to be dramatically decreased due to the reduction of required office space (Xiao et al., 2020).

A previous study by McDowell et al. (2020) has shown that office workers spent more time engaged in sedentary activity during their work hours than their non-work hours. The research also claimed that more sitting was required during WFH due to longer screen time that was expected because of more screen-based meetings and extended work hours. These effects have lowered the ability to engage in other activities and are likely to cause stress or mental illness.

Furthermore, according to the Women's National Commission in April-May 2020 (Kuswartanti & Khansa, 2020), women seem to work twice as much as men during WFH because they have more responsibilities in terms of taking care of

household chores, with a duration of more than 3 hours. As a result, these women experienced increased burnout stress.

The “stay at home” policy also forced mothers to learn technology for their children’s education while doing online learning from home. This is on top of putting more effort into maintaining a clean and healthy life such as food preparation with adequate nutritional intake, thus forcing women to provide extra time taking care of their family (Goetz, 2018).

The study concluded that men have less care in household responsibilities & financial concerns when compared with women. Gender differences in the context of conflict between work & family are faced more by women than men during WFH under the situation of COVID-19 pandemic (Kuswartanti & Khansa, 2020).

During this pandemic, each mother may have slightly different ways to deal with the stress due to her nature and the complexity of the event. These factors could include previous experiences of a hard time situation, current financial status, or a personal or family member’s mental and physical health problem (Okhrimenko & Lyhun 2020). Age can also be assumed to be another factor because different age groups may react and deal with the situation differently (Aleksandrov et al., 2017). Therefore, some may feel stunned, confused with experiences of fear, anxiety, alienation, and so on, while some people might react to the same situation much more sharply.

Interviewing working mothers to find out their main challenges during WFH will not only give the company the supportive suggestion in terms of performance but it will also help an individual to sustain this working condition as it might become the “New Normal” for future work culture.

1.2 Objective

1. To find out what are the perceived challenges and benefits of Thai working mother during work from home
2. To find a deeper insight of working mother and discover the key to enhancing work performance for Thai working mother during working from home

3. To provide suggestions to the managers in order to support working mothers and thereby improve company's performance and employee's well-being during work from home



CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background

Old time traditional norms made women face specific impacts related to gender roles. People still believe that domestic work is the most significant and primary responsibility of women. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has doubled women's working time domestically (Kuswartanti & Khansa, 2020). As mentioned earlier, women experience more conflict as they must work on multiple duties simultaneously while most men can just focus on their work. Researchers (Olson, 1984) have confirmed that male teleworkers reported decreased stress levels when working from home.

Apparently, most of the working mothers who WFH choose to sacrifice their time and work at night, which often causes them to find it difficult to sleep and they become irritable. This is causing stress and generating negative thoughts. This energy can also be one of the triggers for depression for the individual later on (Xiao et al., 2020).

To conclude, the COVID-19 pandemic has turned those working mothers who WFH to become more emotional, stressful, and less efficient in completing their office tasks. Most mothers think that working at home is much more tiring, complicated, and challenging to complete office tasks on time (Kuswartanti & Khansa, 2020).

2.1 Benefits of WFH

Obviously, the first benefit of WFH is to prevent the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus. In this article called *The Benefit of Working From Home: Why the Pandemic Isn't the Only Reason to Work Remotely*, Courtney (2021) mentioned that WFH could make employees be more productive and focused. Benefits that were

mentioned include better work-life balance, less commute stress, location independence, sustainability impact.

2.1.1 Autonomy

Study claimed that WFH gives benefits by saving daily commuting time and offering more flexibility for workers to take care of and spend more time with family. Some workers might find their environment at work as distractions from coworkers, especially the one who can't fit with their peers (Xiao et al., 2020). WFH allows workers to take a break from their office and experience the nature outside by not feeling stuck in the same work environment. Moreover, that person can focus on organizing an individualized approach to their work-life balance that can promote a healthier lifestyle, which would benefit both physical and mental health.

In addition, instead of an old boring office space, workers may have more control over environmental factors when WFH. Indoor environmental quality (IEQ) factors such as lighting, temperature, humidity, air quality, noise, ergonomic, etc. are important for physical and mental health comfort in order to increase productivity, which in turn impacts satisfaction (Samani, 2015).

2.2 Challenges of WFH

In general, challenge is defined as the situation of being faced with something that needs extra mental or physical effort in order to be done or get through successfully and therefore it tests a person's ability (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021). Specific challenges people face and experiences in the condition of WFH during the pandemic might be varied depending on each situation.

Though working from home can make life easier at first, in the long run, it can actually be harmful to a person's mental health (Coworkingresources.org). The study discovered that extended hours of screen exposure due to all day computer work mostly lead to fatigue, tiredness, headaches and eye-related symptoms (Majumdar et al., 2020). In terms of mental health, full time WFH without face-to-face interactions and social support from friends and family could contribute to serious mental issues such as social isolation and depression for those individuals (Mann et al., 2003). In

addition, blurred work-life boundaries may make it difficult to connect mentally from work, which can again increase stress and anxiety. Common area of concern in work-life boundaries is balancing work task when there are other family members around the house, which affects focus on work as time could be “porous.” (Evanoff et al., 2020)

Other disadvantages of WFH could be that workers can lose work motivation since there are so many distractions like social media and other entertainment. For financial concerns, there is the possibility of electricity and internet costs that will increase due to continuous use. (Purwanto et al., 2020).

Research from Kirchner et al. (2021) also mentioned that WFH is more challenging for the manager than employee so there is a potentially higher risk of stress or burnout to their working situation. Managers feel like they are working more due to the increased number of meetings that are tied to screen. Another explanation is that one of the key activities in management, the informal non-planned chat by the water cooler, is turned into more proper and formal planned meetings online. This might explain why some managers are more likely to face a stress burnout, which may lead to lower performance. Another clear challenge mentioned is the “fewer breaks”, where the managers experience being more tied to the computer than their staff. To conclude, there are challenges for every position while WFH.

2.2.1 Fear of Insecurity & Job Lost

Due to COVID-19, someone in the household had lost a job, taken a pay cut, or both. By mid-April 2020, the national unemployment rate in the US reached 14.7%, the highest it has been since the Great Depression (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). The study showed that job insecurity following the great recession was associated with higher odds of citizens experiencing fear, depression, and anxiety. Consequently, due to the events of the COVID-19 pandemic, many workers have experienced extremely high levels of job insecurity (Wilson et al., 2020). Job insecurity is a stressful experience associated with distress and negative feelings mostly because of the financial concern.

Even for the gender pay gap, although widely studied, (Gariety & Shaer (2007), Bloom et al. (2015), Arntz et al. (2019), and Angelici and Profeta (2020)),

there is not a clear evidence of the effect of WFH to point out that it may reduce wage differences between male and females' workers. However, other studies have Weeden (2005), Goldin (2014), and Bertrand (2018) showing results in the opposite direction.

2.2.2 Home environment

Home to work conflict (HTWC) means obstructions when teleworking with interferences of private life or home activities. WFH forced us to merge work and private life together but because we all have different backgrounds, some employees might have different situations in their home environment. Bhattacharya et al. (2021) mentioned that family, noise, and other distractions and factors that facilitate work at home have an impact on their work. These include IT background knowledge, electricity devices, Wi-Fi, and other such required software for teleconnection.

Therefore, workers who are trained and have proper set up at home would be ready to work efficiently. Without proper training and the right equipment, Kaur (2020) compared it as exactly the same as joining an army and on the second day you are told to go parachute jumping without having experienced it before. The above problem is the same. They also stated it is more challenging for women to learn and prepare for these trainings, as extra time is needed to handle newer challenges whenever there are household responsibilities, and it might be a bit difficult to manage this demanding task.

Mattal Darji (Kaur & Sharma, 2020) conducted the research that investigated the untapped problems of working women of India to balance personal and professional life. She found out that the variables identified were family size, hours of work, children's age, and social support.

2.2.3 Cyberslacking

O'Neill et al. (2014) defined cyberslacking as a condition in which workers are distracted by non-related work such as internet browsing when they should be accomplishing the specific work tasks. Blanchard (2008) said that often the individuals are seeking non-work tasks such as planning vacations, online shopping, and non-work e-mailing. This happens especially when the working's environment is more casual and convenient such as when working from home.

The research by Moody (2013) claimed that the determinants of cyberslacking are complex. All they know for sure is that these factors include attitudes, emotions, and social conditions. This also had an effect in terms of level of performance and productivity while WFH.

2.2.4 Over-Consumption of Social Media

A sedentary lifestyle involves a lot of sitting and lying down, with very much doing nothing. It apparently causes many different negative side effects. The study mentioned that being regularly physically active has many physical and mental health benefits, while engaging in high sedentary time is negatively associated with many similar outcomes (*McDowell et al., 2020*).

Social media, internet browsing and digital devices are such an essential tool for our people nowadays, it provides a platform to cope with social isolation. However, there are some studies that claim to have a negative effect on each individual. In this case, I would like to mention some negative effects of social media on business (*Akram & Kumar, 2020*) since it has the linkage between sedentary behavior which affects job performance and productivity. For instance, negative customer reviews are harmful, highly time consuming and the mistake made on social media is hard to rectify.

Working mothers who are in the age between 18 to 35 years old have increased the frequency of consuming social media which lead to sedentary lifestyle (*Orzech et al. 2016*). Moreover, these uses of social media and digital devices also have impacts on sleep. Therefore, bad quality sleep could lead to symptoms like stress, fatigue and health disorder which again affect the causing challenge to the working mother who is working from home.

2.2.5 Isolation/Social Needs

Research has shown that one of the predictors that influences employees who WFH is the quality of their social contacts (*Russo et al., 2020*). Without it, it will cause stress, which can affect an individual's well-being in such a negative way, especially for working mothers who WFH. In addition, boredom and distractions also predicted negative outcomes in terms of productivity and performances while WFH.

2.3 Team Leader Support

Ryan and Deci (2017) define self-determination theory (SDT) as the understanding of motivation to why we engage in work activities. Unlike controlled and autonomous motivation, SDT could be used to provide a framework through which team leaders may contribute to create an optimal remote working environment for workers.

2.3.1 Motivation during WFH

Orsini et al. (2020) studied the supporting motivation for teams while working remotely. There is a role for basic psychological needs. Therefore, they thought that the role of team leaders is very important. As WFH became a “new normal” of working, well-intentioned actions might affect and undermine their motivation. This means the leadership and managerial style of team leaders will have great potential to support or block employee’s motivation (Fernet et al. 2012).

2.3.2 Controlled motivation

Ten cate et al. (2011) identify controlled motivation as job engagement due to external reasons such as social approval, material rewards or avoidance of external or internal pressure.

2.3.3 Autonomous motivation

On the other hand, Autonomous motivation involves engagement due to true interest and value of work activities. The research shows that this type of motivation leads to positive outcomes such as self-worth, psychological wellness and self-learner style (Van den Berghe et al. 2014; Orsini et al. 2020.)

To conclude, SDT while working remotely or not, employee’s autonomous motivation still depends on how they perceive their work environment as supportive or their basic psychological needs of autonomy while feeling the sense of self-efficacy and job relatedness (for example, feeling of belonging or importance to others or the company) (Ten Cate et al. 2011). (Gagne et al. 2018; Orsini et al. 2020), previous work has shown that when team leaders are more needs-supportive, employees likely to internalize the value of their work efforts in order to switch into more autonomously

motivated, resulting in improving performance and displaying higher wellbeing and work satisfaction.

Research model

This model shows us that these internal and external factors have a potential impact on a working mother's productivity and job satisfaction during WFH.

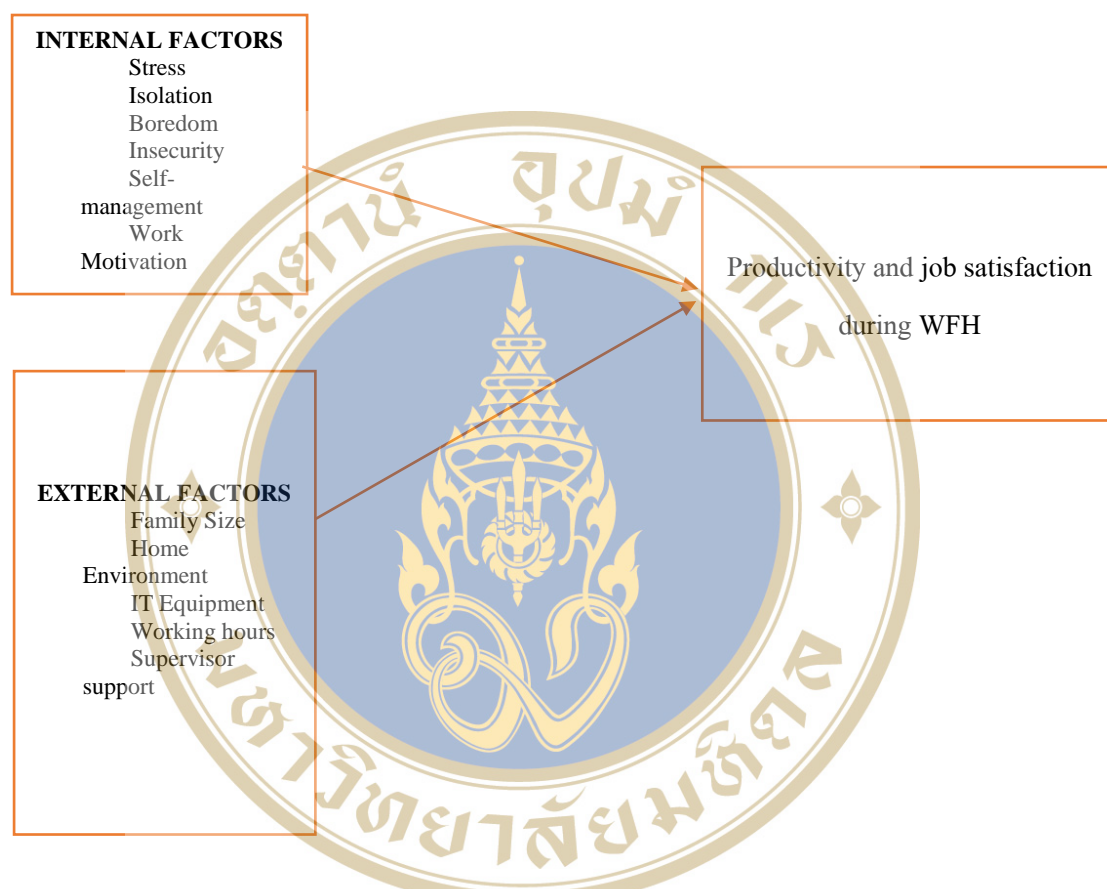


Figure 2.1 Research Model Framework

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Primary Data Collection Method

After information found in literature review, there are some variables mentioned that would cause challenges to Thai working mothers who WFH.

The overall approach of this research is to find out challenges perceived by a working mother who has experience of working from home, not just to identify the challenges itself but to gain a better and deeper insight of Thai working mothers. It is also beneficial for companies to find the most suitable solution in order to improve the overall productivity.

This research will use a qualitative approach through interviews (Semi-structured), since we need to find out deeper insights of Thai working mothers who WFH. With this approach, it is possible to identify the challenges, benefits or linkage through their perceptions and also the researcher can explore further by simply asking questions for that particular subject.

Interviews

By using the interview as a tool to explore deeper insights, the question will be asked in a casual approach to make the interviewees feel comfortable since we need them to express their feelings and information as much as possible. Each interview will be held around 20-30 mins. The interviews are conducted by having an interactive face-to-face conversation with the interviewees. Voice recording devices will be used as an evidence of the study and also to refer back to the subject.

Probing technique

We are also using Probing Technique to ensure the validity of the data. Probing Technique is getting deep into the subject by using the replies of the interviewee to explore more details by asking further questions (McDaniel & Gates, 2015).

3.2 Sample selection

For this research, the interviewees are 8 selected samples of Thai working mothers who have experiences of working from home and currently living in Bangkok. Age range of the mothers are between 30-45 years old. Ages of the children are between 2-6 years old because the researcher felt that these particular age ranges of children require the most attention which may deliver challenges to the mother.

Table 3.1 Interviewee list

Participant	Position	Number of kids	Age of the kids	Age of mother	Working experience within the company	House Members
A	Senior Branding Manager	2	4 years old 6 years old	40 years old	10 years	5 persons (nanny included)
B	PR Communication manager	2	5 years old 2 Years old	38 years old	8 years	6 persons (nanny included)
C	Graphic designer	1	4 Years old	33 years old	4 years	6 persons
D	Public Relation	1	2 Years old	45 years old	15 Years	5 persons (nanny included)
E	Project Co. (Branding & Production)	2	2 Years old 3 Years old	32 years old	9 years	10 persons
F	Accountant	1	4 years old	40 years old	8 years	3 persons
G	University teacher (Interior design)	1	4 years old	40 years old	15 years	3 persons
H	IT development	1	4 years old	35 years old	10 years	3 persons

3.3 Interview Questions

“During Covid-19, many organizations allowed their employees to work from home in order to stop the outbreak of the virus but because usually, the role of being a mother has more responsibilities around the house, I wanted to focus on working mothers. Therefore, I found it fascinating that mothers have to work extra harder than usual and I will be interested to know more about it.”

Interview Questions

1. Could you tell me about your job? What is your position?
2. How long have you been working within this company?
3. How many kids do you have and how old are they?
4. During WFH, how many people were living at home?
5. What were the most challenges for you during WFH? Could you tell me about those experiences?
6. Does it affect your stress level and how?
7. Even though you have kids around the house, do you feel any kind of social isolation? Or wanted to meet your friend and colleague in person? Please describe those feelings.
8. Have you ever felt bored while working from home and what did you do to overcome that problem?
9. Have you ever felt the sense of insecurity or uncertainty in terms of job loss/financial concern during the WFH period? And how did you manage?
10. Were you happy with your job when working from home or what did you need from the company to support you during that time?
11. Tell me more about how you manage yourself under the role of a working mother. Do you have more motivation to work at home or at the office? Please describe.
12. Please describe how you manage your time while working from home. For example, extended hours sitting or do you have a few breaks from time to time?
13. Do you think working from home has provided you a better solution? How would you describe differences between office space and home space? Does it make any difference in terms of productivity or performance?

14. During work from home, did you have any problem in terms of IT equipment or knowledge to use the software for working remotely? If yes, please describe.

15. Do you often find yourself lost in something non-work related? Tell me what you mostly got lost into?



CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

After concluding the qualitative research by conducting interviews through 8 participants of working mothers who live in Bangkok, the obtained data is analyzed and summarized in this chapter by grouping into 2 main topics as internal factors and external factors. Each factor has its own sub-headings.

4.1 Perceived psychological challenges

4.1.1 Stress due to multitasking

During the quarantine, working from home has affected participants in terms of stress in such different ways. 8 out of 8 respondents reported that they have somehow experienced a stressful situation during the lockdown. The main issue that causes stress while WFH would come from their children that required a lot of attention and also disturbing them during working hours. Therefore, they all faced difficulty managing their time with their children.

“I was quite stressed at first because I needed to adapt myself to the situation. I needed to let my children understand why I chose to spend time on the phone instead of playing with them. At first, they wouldn’t understand and became so moody. it was quite a big challenge especially when the work is not working as I wanted it to be.” **Participant A**

“My older kid has given a lot of homework and if I don’t help him finish it in time then it will pile up while I already have a lot of my own work to do.” **Participant B**

“It was very stressful because when my kid has to learn online, I can’t really work until night time. I was lacking sleep and eventually got sick.” **Participant C**

“My kid didn’t want to stay with the nanny anymore when I was WFH, he would come upstairs and distract me throughout the zoom meeting.” **Participant D**

“It was really stressful because I couldn’t work at all. I have to find a way to let my daughter play by herself and the only way is by giving her a mobile phone. I’m very concerned about child development but if I didn’t let her play with the phone, I would get very annoyed and eventually yell at her.” **Participant H**

“My stress came from the rush and pressure under workloads. The company didn’t care if I was eating or busy and this is including the weekend. Whenever there is a meeting I have to be ready and sometimes it will finish late at night when I can’t really focus because I have to put my kid into bed.” **Participant F**

“During WFH, the dean warned us that the teacher must be concerned and aware of student’s well-being as the first priority. Usually the student will have more problems than the teachers such as lack of IT equipment, internet connection, some didn’t have an ideal setting for online learning, not to mention all the distractions for each student. According to this, I have to lower my expectations and my overall teaching performance was not as good as it should be. it was also harder to grade the student” **Participant G**

4.1.2 Time-management challenge

8 out of 8 respondents mentioned that ‘time management’ was the main challenge while working from home. In addition, discipline was required in order to force the mother from switching tasks. For those who live in a bigger family size, they managed to let others take care of their child while working remotely.

“You have to be so disciplined due to the flexible hours of working, and also be able to manage your time to play with the kids...I was very lucky that I have a nanny or my grandmother to look after them from time to time.” **Participant A**

“Time management is the only thing that is required during that time. It needs a lot of effort at the beginning but once I get used to it, I think it’s better to work from home because I get to spend more time with my kid.” **Participant D**

“My work would start earlier in the morning but I managed to force myself to stop during lunch break. it requires more sitting at home than the office.” **Participant E**

One participant mentioned that being alone with the kid was a tough challenge. She needed someone else to help her take care of the kid because her husband wasn't home during that time.

"To continue my workflow, I have to give my daughter a mobile phone to play with. Most of the time I felt really guilty but it was the only way to keep her company for a long period of time without distracting me. I have regretted this decision until today because she would ask me whenever she sees me working and she is only 4 years old!" **Participant H**

Cyberslacking

After I asked the respondents whether they have experienced any kind of cyberslacking activity while working remotely from home, 5 respondents admitted that they were involved in cyberslacking activity through social media or online shopping from time to time. Therefore, it wasn't really an issue or problem for these respondents. In fact, it is just a normal behavior in order to take a break and refresh themselves from a long period of work.

"I have to admit that I was involved in this kind of activity not only from home but during the time at the office as well. Only at home you can easily get distracted to entertainment media like watching Netflix due to flexible hours of working." **Participant A**

"You can't just sit for 8 hours every day and not get distracted by social media or online shopping." **Participant E**

"At home during lunch break, I like to watch YouTube videos and realize that it was already past my breaktime." **Participant F**

"I often feel isolated because I can't really go outside at that time. So, I search for online shopping during my work time." **Participant H**

While another 3 claimed that they didn't have time for those kinds of activities because their priority is to work and take care of their children.

"I have limited time, like I mentioned earlier that my time was dedicated to my children in the morning. So, during the afternoon I have to spend my time wisely focusing on work." **Participant B**

"I don't really have time for that at all!" **Participant C**

4.1.3 Insecurity

6 out of 8 respondents stated their feeling of insecurity and uncertainty of the upcoming future. Some were afraid in terms of financial concerns, job loss, job capability and the global economy direction.

However, all of these feelings were experienced during the early stage of the pandemic. After a while, they adapted through these fears of insecurity.

“In terms of job loss, no...but for the financial concerns. I must admit that I was afraid because I didn’t know if they would cut down my salary or not. The economy was in a downturn and I was feeling insecure.” Participant A

“I was afraid at the beginning, many companies under the same umbrella had invited people out of their jobs but I was very lucky that my company didn’t have many employees.” Participant B

“I wasn’t sure if I would lose my job but I was very lucky that there was only one position for graphic design at that time. it gave me a sense of relief.” Participant C

“How am I going to do my job? I don’t think an accountant would be able to work from home. How can you deliver and work on all these documents? Do I need a printer? After a while I realized that you can sign and approve documents through an online system.” Participant F

“Covid-19 changes the world in just a blink of an eye. What is going to happen next? This gave me a feeling of insecurity in my family.” Participant H

Another 2 respondents were not afraid because the company has supported them in terms of clear direction and personal well-being.

“Not at all, I must admire my company because they have a clear notice with good support. The HR keeps following up with each staff member on their personal health and well-being.” Participant D

“Not really because the company gave us a clear direction.” Participant E

4.1.4 Boredom

Only 3 out of 8 respondents reported that they have experienced boredom from time to time. The rest mentioned that they prefer to stay at home. Then I asked

one participant whether WFH stopped her from doing any kind of hobby. She told me that she didn't have time for it.

*A: As a mother, I only focus on work and my child. Therefore, I don't have time for any kind of hobby or need to go outside. I wasn't bored, it was quite the same before the lockdown. **Participant C***

While those who experienced boredom mentioned that WFH has lowered their performance or they would like a personal space without being with her kid all the time.

*"After experiencing WFH, I really want to get out and go to work at the office because it makes my daily routine more structured where I get to see my friends. I love my daughter to death but I can't just stay with her 24 hours. I was really stressed and hoped that everything would go back to normal." **Participant H***

4.1.5 Isolation

In terms of isolation, only 2 out of 8 respondents reported that they often felt lonely and needed social interaction while the rest didn't have problems at all because they'd regularly discussed with their teammate through online applications or they would rather spend time with their family. Being an introvert also helped.

*"I am an introvert so I didn't feel any kind of social isolation" **Participant A***

"Not really because we often have zoom meeting and discuss regularly"

Participant B

While the extrovert tends to feel isolated because they want to meet others in person instead of online meetings.

*"I miss my team and want to meet them in person" **Participant E***

*"I often feel isolated due to lack of social interaction with my teammate, since all my time were dedicated to my work and children" **Participant H***

4.1.6 Work Motivation

During WFH, 3 out of 8 respondents claimed that WFH has increased their motivation to work. They believe that working remotely gives them a better solution.

*“I would rather WFH if there is no interruption, it provides me a better environment to work more efficiently and since I am a manager, I have to be more motivated due to high job responsibility.” **Participant A***

*“I think people who WFH tend to have more responsibility because when I am at home, I have to motivate myself to become more active” **Participant B***

*“My motivation during that time was quite high because I was afraid to lose my job. So, I have to fight and challenge myself all the time. I consider myself as a responsible person.” **Participant C***

2 respondents mentioned that they didn't see much of a difference. It depends on the work task. For instance, motivation to work as a team has decreased when the respondent couldn't interact with them in person.

*“I don't see any difference in terms of motivation. It depends on each task. For example, the task that requires brainstorming with the team then I felt that I was more motivated to communicate with them face to face, demonstrating through whiteboard etc. It was also more fun to meet them in person because through the Zoom meeting, you only got like 30 mins for each session.” **Participant D***

*“My motivation at that time was very moderate” **Participant E***

While 3 respondents admitted that their motivation to work has decreased during the pandemic. Due to self-adaptation at the early stage, poor performance and distraction from her daughter.

*“At the beginning it was really hard to motivate myself to work because my schedule was really messy.” **Participant F***

*“Motivation to teach has dropped, I noticed that learning received from the students has also dropped. Even though I keep consistency in reminding students to submit their work, most of them didn't respond to the email and so on.” **Participant G***

*“Motivation to work was quite low because I was so tired from the distractions of my daughter. This overall stressful situation resulted in poor performance.” **Participant H***

4.2 External factors that created challenges during WFH

4.2.1 Extended Working hours

During WFH, all the respondents reported that their working hours were likely to be extended. Also, some have mentioned that WFH has shifted their daily routine and work life balance to become unstructured. Apart from unexpected meeting hours that the mother has to be ready at all time, one participant thought that WFH gave her extra hours to work.

“During lockdown, I have more time to work and finish my project because I can just wake up and go straight from bed to work without wasting time on transportation or grabbing lunch outside.” Participant E

“During the day I can't really work because I have to take care of my child for online courses. So, my work will start from the evening to late night.” Participant C

“Unexpected Zoom meeting hours force me to be available at all times, no matter what I have to say, yes...” Participant B

“Usually I finish work at 5 or 6pm but when I WFH, my work continued until night time but the good thing was I could save all those times travelling to the office with slightly extended hours.” Participant D

“I couldn't manage my time at all because I have to take care of my daughter in the evening so when there is a zoom call during night time, I have to mute the audio and only listen.” Participant H

Another aspect that the interviewees have mentioned was the pressure from work tasks. Apart from extended working hours, they feel like they have to sacrifice more effort and the quality of performance has maintained the same or lower.

4.2.2 Family Size

5 out of 8 interviewees had a bigger family size which included 5 or more people. This group of respondents tend to have less stress compared with the other 3 interviewees who live in smaller family sizes which include only 3 people. Through an observation, it shows that a family with a nanny also helps a lot because it reduces

workload for the mother when it comes to sharing household activities or looking after the kid while the mother is working.

Even though only one respondent didn't agree on the same thing. She mentioned that more people in the house mean more distractions. However, she still hired a nanny to look after her two children because she couldn't focus on her work.

"I think the more people in the house, the more distractions. I can't really focus on my work when there are a lot of things going on." **Participant A**

"I have 6 people staying at home, we help each other taking care of the house" **Participant C**

Therefore, it shows that family size also impacts the level of stress which affects the overall performance of the working mother who WFH. More number of kids means more responsibility and more time required, which is likely to cause burdens to the mother for not having personal time to work on her project.

"I think smaller family size influences a higher level of stress because whenever my grandmother came and visited, she helped take care of the kid and this gave us personal time to work on our projects." **Participant G**

4.2.3 Home environment

5 out of 8 respondents confirmed that working from home without interruption is better than working at the office. They tend to be more focused and productive. In addition, the respondents also mentioned that if their supervisor didn't show up at work then they would prefer working from home. Another positive aspect apart from saving transportation cost and time would be the fact that the mothers get to spend time with their kids or family more often because usually when they got back from work, the children were already sleeping.

"WFH gave me a relaxed working atmosphere. Without interruption from my sons, I was more creative and productive which resulting in a better outcome except that my bedroom didn't have a proper desk to work with and with longer hours of sitting, often time I get backache" **Participant A**

"In the afternoon when my kid took a nap, I was able to concentrate on my work at home better than the office. Nowadays, my boss doesn't usually show up at

work only through Zoom meeting so I don't see an important of going to work anymore because I was more productive at home” **Participant B**

“As a graphic designer, a home environment provides me with a better working space. I was more productive with sharp concentration especially in the night time.” **Participant C**

“After I adapted myself to the extended hours and unexpected zoom call, I realized that someday I finished work early, like 5 o'clock before the sun was about to go down. I was able to take my son for a walk around the park nearby, which I wasn't able to do before because by the time I got home It was already too late. I was so happy to see him smile and spend more time with him.” **Participant D**

Meanwhile, 3 respondents stated that they didn't see much of a difference but when there was a task that required a lot of communication, they thought that working at the office is still more suitable for them to avoid confusion in work tasks.

“I don't see much of a difference but sometimes there was a task that required a lot of communication, WFH could cause a bit of confusion. Even though working from home gives me more time to work, I still think that the office environment would give me a proper working station.” **Participant E**

“At home all the spaces were dedicated and designed for my son, there is no separation of my room or his room. So, during WFH, it was difficult to find a working space without his interruption while I was teaching my students online.” **Participant G**

“Work itself was not really an issue but to manage work while taking care of my daughter was such a burden. My schedule was shattered and became very unstructured. Therefore, I think WFH is not suitable for me at all.” **Participant H**

4.2.4 Supervisor support

The researcher asked the interviewees about communication structure with their bosses and what needed to be improved in order to support the employee's well-being during WFH. In terms of communication structure, half of the respondents had concerns while working remotely. They mentioned that it was more difficult to communicate without face-to-face interactions which caused a bit of confusion.

Moreover, not keeping in touch with the supervisor can sometimes make the participant more worried, anxious and overthinking as well.

“...Updating through Line application on regular routine work was okay for me. Only if there was a certain meeting that required emotional engagement then I found out that face to face interaction is better in order to avoid miscommunication.”

Participant A

“I don’t usually communicate with my boss that often since I am a graphic designer. Most of the time, I often worry whether she wonders if I spend most of my time in sedentary behavior at home or not. Only my team would understand me but I am not sure about her.” **Participant C**

Another half of the respondents said that they’ve received good support from their bosses. The supervisor keeps updating work through software applications or policy to make sure everything stays on track.

“Even though my boss doesn’t usually come to the office anymore, we often meet in Zoom meetings or we can contact her through her secretary. Since it’s a small company with less hierarchy, it’s not that complex in terms of communication.”

Participant B

“My supervisor has provided a survey question checking whether there is anything that the employees need or any problems while working from home.”

Participant E

“We have line groups, an IT support team and also a company’s policy called “HBU” which keeps consistency of each department’s performance. Later on, if the team has shown a good result then the company will let the head of the team take care of their own staff without strict monitoring.” **Participant D**

4.2.5 IT components/ background knowledge

5 of 8 participants responded that they didn’t have any problem in terms of IT component or its background knowledge because they were familiar with the software before the lockdown. 2 mentioned that it was quite a challenge at first while another one mentioned that stability of internet connection was an issue while WFH.

“My husband works as an IT and he was also working at home by that time. So, everything went smoothly. He helps me from time to time.” **Participant C**

“Not a problem, because before the lockdown our company has been practicing and familiar with the zoom meeting program. Also, there is IT support whenever we need help.” Participant E

“At the beginning, I didn’t know how to use it at all. Which button do I need to push? or why didn’t people’s faces show up? It took me a couple months to actually get used to it.” Participant F

“One time it was raining really hard and the electricity went off. Instead I have to use my personal Wi-Fi hotspot and it was not working very well that really affected my online teaching.” Participant G

4.3 Job satisfaction

7 out of 8 respondents reported positively in terms of job satisfaction. Some mentioned that they were lucky enough that they didn’t lose their job during the pandemic. In fact, the company has provided a very good situation for those who WFH.

“I am still okay and happy with my work when compared to others who has lost their job during the pandemic.” Participant H

“I am happy with my work especially when my company has provided a very good supportive solution for all the employees of WFH.” Participant D

To explain, she mentioned that the company has provided supportive solutions in terms of IT equipment such as laptops and smartphones while the HR keeps updating with staff’s well-being through weekly phone calls, surveys and online discussion boards.

Only one respondent didn’t enjoy her job during WFH because she had to focus on the student's well-being while her teaching performance couldn’t serve her satisfaction.

“During WFH, my job satisfaction was lower than usual because I couldn’t teach the students 100% like I used to. it was more difficult to teach architecture design through an online platform especially when I have to care about their well-being as a first priority.” Participant G

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, from the data collected through interviewing 8 participants, 2 major perceived challenge factors that influence working mother's productivity during WFH were classified into 2 groups, which are perceived psychological challenges and external factors that created challenges during WFH. After finding deeper insights, we found out that WFH was a difficult challenge during the early stage. Through self-adaptation, they seem to be able to manage their work flow at home. However, companies still need to implement changes within the organization in order to improve overall productivity and employee well-being with low chance of turnover.

5.1.1 Perceived psychological challenges

Dealing with stress has become the most common challenge mentioned by all participants. Distraction from their children and higher pressure on work tasks were stated as the most challenging topics. Another factor is time management. All of the respondents claimed that managing time during WFH was the most difficult challenge, especially in a smaller family size where the mother needs a lot of discipline to manage their time between the hours of work and home. However, unexpected zoom meetings outside of working time still acts as a disturbance under this subject. The third challenge would be the feelings of insecurity. During WFH, mothers were feeling anxious about the uncertainty of the future, financial loss. or how can they perform their work task while working remotely from home. For motivation and job satisfaction, almost everybody was happy with their job. Only a few may have lowered their motivation because their work performance has decreased or through adaptation at the early stage. Last but not least, boredom and isolation seem not to cause any concerns for working mothers. They said that they have experienced

boredom from time to time but still prefer to stay at home. Isolation is not a problem for them because they can regularly see and interact with teammates through social platforms.

5.1.2 External factors that created challenges during WFH

Extended working hours obviously increase workload but it seems that unexpected zoom calls were an issue for most of the respondents because it interrupts them from their daily plan and schedule. Family size only matters if the house members are willing to help and share responsibility around the house. It shows that having a nanny can increase the productivity of a mother because they can separate the children from the mother while the mother works remotely. Surprisingly, more than half of the participants mentioned that 'home environment' is a better solution than the office because they can focus and become more productive. Supervisor support is another external factor influencing productivity during WFH. Through online interaction, it may cause a bit of confusion rather than communicating in person. Moreover, WFH can distance the employees from their supervisor which makes the employee become anxious, worried or overthink. Apart from that, IT component and cyberslacking was an issue but it doesn't seem to have a big impact toward productivity during WFH.

5.1.3 Discussion

According to the literature review, the findings are quite similar. In terms of perceived psychological challenges, participants have to face challenges of burnout stress, insecurity and difficulty in time management which may affect productivity. Yet, they didn't seem to report low motivation or job dissatisfaction which contrasts with past studies (Purwanto et al., 2020) which stated that disadvantages of WFH could be that workers could lose work motivation from distraction like social media and other entertainment. Therefore, regarding motivation theory, we can conclude that most of the participants were having autonomous motivation. which means they were engaged with work through true interest and value of work activities (Van den Berghe et al. 2014; Orsini et al. 2020).

The past study mentioned that isolation or social needs is one of the predictors which affect WFH employees in stress and negative well-being. However, the result of this study has shown that isolation or social needs wasn't a challenge for most of the participants. In fact, the mother was happy to spend more time with her children or to talk with their teammates through an online platform.

We can agree that extended hours of work affect physical well-being through fatigue, tiredness, and headaches (Majumdar et al., 2020). In terms of mental health, the past study (Mann & Holdsworth, Tavares, 2003, 2007) mentioned WFH without face-to-face interactions and social support could contribute to serious mental issues such as social isolation and depression, which is not true for this study. 6 out of 8 respondents claimed that they didn't experience any kind of social isolation during the extended hours of WFH.

Family size was mentioned by (Kaur & Sharma, 2020) as one of the untapped problems for working women of India to balance personal and professional life. In this case, bigger family size seems to give advantage for working mothers during WFH. As Thailand is very family-oriented, family members help each other by sharing responsibilities around the house. On top of that they are familiar and used to having servants or nanny which reduce the house workloads of a mother.

The mentioned study also stated that it's more challenging for women to learn and prepare a proper set up at home in terms of right IT equipment, background knowledge, teleconnection and so on in order to work more efficiently. This is somehow true but it didn't serve as a main challenge for women in this case at all. 6 out of 8 respondents didn't have any problem in IT knowledge or equipment and the other 2 respondents said that it was hard only at the beginning but they didn't think it's a problem. Furthermore, they thought that the home environment is a better place for mothers to work more efficiently only if there is no distraction.

5.2 Recommendation

As WFH is likely to become a common thing for many working mothers. Many organizations should consider and be aware of a working mother's well-being. Based on these research findings, time management, insecurity, work motivation and

supervisor support were the elements which may cause stress and lead to low productivity. These elements are why the company should at least take some action in order to improve overall productivity and employees' well-being. Therefore, the author would like to provide suggestions to the managerial level in order to support working mothers' employees during WFH.

5.2.1 Set the right time

Firstly, the manager should set a boundary of time limit. General group meetings should be held within regular working hours because most mothers are facing difficulty managing their time due to unexpected zoom meeting hours, which is likely to disturb their daily house routine (Participant B, C). Only personal or emergency calls are acceptable in this case. Secondly, the manager should construct clear deadlines, goals or KPI for these working mothers to follow within the limited time frame. This will make it easier for the mother to plan, adjust and manage their time more efficiently during WFH.

5.2.2 Turn organization into comfort and joyful community

For insecurity, since most of the working mothers were afraid of financial concerns like reduction in wages (Participant A), job lost (Participant B, C) or poor economic situation (Participant H), organizations should inform clear direction and status of the company to working mothers through personal phone calls, social media to keep in touch and update on each mother's well-being. This is to make sure that they won't feel anxious about company direction, envy about income differences, self-doubt toward themselves or another colleague's success.

To increase more motivation, online social platforms like websites, Facebook pages or LINE groups should be implemented with activities that could enhance employee's engagement. Updating daily news, useful information and team-building activities will help the working mother to stay involved and feel like they are part of the company. For instance, online special speakers for free training sessions, online games or team competition with rewards can all keep working mothers engaged. This high employee engagement will result in greater attendance, higher productivity, lower turnover and healthier work culture.

5.2.3 Good supervisor support

For supervisor support, the company should try to reduce ambiguity by posting or announcing the projects and meeting in advance. This will avoid the unexpected zoom meeting day and the employees can prepare themselves with more questions. Respondents have also indicated that they worry about what the supervisors think of them (Participant C). This can be helped by supervisors providing more positive reinforcement from time to time. Moreover, the HR department should conduct a survey to find out the overall needs of the employees such as home conditions, IT equipment, software licenses or other issues to understand what the company needs to improve to enhance employee's productivity during the WFH period.

5.3 Limitation

This study has potential limitations. The interviews were conducted within a short period of time, approximately around 2 weeks focusing on those working mothers who only live in Bangkok. Plus, the number of respondents is a relatively small sample size which affects the overall result's accuracy. Therefore, to develop further upon the limitation mentioned above, the future research can achieve better results by extending more scope of study to explore more variables that potentially affect the productivity of Thai working mothers during WFH.

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